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Central Americans reject Brezhnev-Castro influence

To The Denver Post:

AN AUG. 6 Denver Post article, "Somóza Coup Called Crucial Event," describes a CIA view of events in Nicaragua, and presently in El Salvador, as "Cuban-backed" and aimed at Cuban and Soviet preeminence in Central America. This view of Central American politics, in its essential implications, is one thoroughly rejected by those closest to the people and internal situation of Nicaragua and El Salvador, namely, the religious community. I refer specifically to the Jesuit fathers and brothers of Central America and the United States, the Maryknoll fathers and sisters, the Capuchin fathers and brothers, and the bulk of the Catholic hierarchy in each country. Most notable among these was the archbishop of San Salvador, Monsignor Oscar Romero, assassinated by a hired gunman March 24, for his championing of the common people against the forces of repression.

Our experience at the grass roots with the common people of Central America indicates overwhelmingly that the opposition to present government forces in El Salvador and to the dictatorship of General Somoza has had thoroughly native roots. I once questioned an old Nicaraguan on the so-called "Cuban Connection" being touted by the CIA. He said to me in 1978 very simply, "We don't need Fidel Castro to tell us we are poor." That, really, is the central issue. The common people have had their hopes and awareness raised by their bishops and church themselves, by the gospel and their innate patriotism. There is precious little room in this context for Castro communism and Russian influence.

If one considers how thoroughly inaccurate CIA staff members were in assessing developments in Iran before the shah's fall, it is not surprising to see them err now in their

interpretation of Central America. The Cuban-Russian scenario is so shopworn it should be embarrassing to trot it out in public. The same underestimation of native, national, Moslem religious opposition to the shah was evidenced in the CIA view of Iran in 1978. The consequences for our foreign policy have been disastrous.

Now, just as outside communist agitation was and is neither needed nor tolerated in Iran in the overthrow of the shah, we may be confident that the Nicaraguans and Salvadorans are not going to exchange one form of dictatorship for another, Somoza for Castro or General Romero for Brezhnev.

We of the Catholic religious communities mentioned above, and I will add, the Latin Office of the Protestant National Council of Churches in New York, see the Cuban-Russian theme as literally a "red herring." If believed by the American people it would obtain for our State Department a carte blanche for the already destructive policies that have marked our relationships with Central America over the years. It is further notable that the CIA agent referred to in The Post article was a Latin military officer, Rafeal Martinez-Boucher. In Central America no less creditable witness could be found to interpret events than the military. Their alliance with wealth and power against the poor in Central America is the sole factor provoking violent responses by the common people.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The Rev. Joseph Towle recently attended the Tekakwitha Conference of American Catholic Indians, held at Loretto Heights College in Denver. He is director of social and pastoral ministries for the New York Province Society of Jesus.